1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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preliminary, classification of Nuer territorial groups of a political kind. We have classified Nuer socio-temporal categories. We now classify their socio-spatial categories.

Were a man to fly over Nuerland he would see, as on Plate XVI, taken by the Royal Air Force in the dry season, white patches with what look like tiny fungoid growths on them. These are village sites with huts and byres. He would see that between such patches are stretches of brown and black, the brown being open grassland and the black being depressions which are swampy in the rains; and that the white patches are wider and more frequent in some parts than in others. We find Nuer give to these distributions certain values which compose their political structure.

It would be possible to measure the exact distance between hut and hut, village and village, tribal area and tribal area, and so forth, and the space covered by each. This would give us a statement of spatial measurements in bare physical terms. By itself it would have very limited significance. Oecological space is more than mere physical distance, though it is affected by it, for it is reckoned also by the character of the country intervening between local groups and its relation to the biological requirements of their members. A broad river divides two Nuer tribes more sharply than many miles of unoccupied bush. A distance which appears small in the dry season has a different appearance when the area it covers is flooded in the rains. A village community which has permanent water near at hand is in a very different position to one which has to travel in the dry season to obtain water, pasturage, and fishing. A tsetse belt creates an impassable barrier, giving wide oecological distance between the peoples it separates (p. 133), and presence or absence of cattle among neighbours of the Nuer likewise determines the oecological distance between them and the Nuer (pp. 132–3). Oecological distance, in this sense, is a relation between communities defined in terms of density and distribution, and with reference to water, vegetation, animal and insect life, and so on.

Structural distance is of a very different order, though it is always influenced and, in its political dimension, to a large extent determined by oecological conditions. By structural

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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the country to the east (Gaawar country) to such an extent that a journey which, in the ordinary course of events (in the dry season) is a matter of some inconvenience owing to the uncertainty of finding water, had to be performed for a distance of 80 miles in a canoe. And, in the same year, Nyerol post, thirty five miles to the south of Abwong, on the River Sobat (Lou country), which was usually supplied over a waterless tract (in the dry season) was only with the greatest of difficulty kept in touch with civilization owing to the country in between them being almost entirely under water.*

By November the Sobat has commenced to fall and to drain the streams which serve as its channels of overflow in flood. These streams now contribute to its volume of water with the result that the fall of water at Nasser is registered at the Sobat mouth three weeks or more later.† While the land is being drained by the Sobat the rains have ceased and the sun has evaporated surface water. The grasses are burnt and the country takes on its dry season appearance of a fissured waterless waste. The change from wet-season conditions to dry-season conditions is sudden.

Travelling in February from the Sobat to Pathai and thence eastward to Pul Fadoi, along the newly-made motor road, one traverses slightly higher ground through a thin *Aeglig* forest which screens the full desolation of the country, for, though in reality it offers scanty shade, it gives an appearance of verdure and freshness, and the ground is carpeted with the oval fawn-coloured fruits of the *Aeglig*. Game is plentiful and forest pools numerous. But the western part of Lou country, occupied by the Mor tribal section, from Pul Fadoi eastwards for over a hundred kilometres, is bleak and its bleakness is, on the whole, typical of the rest of Lou country and of Nuerland in general. It is thickly covered with dead grasses, from 4 to 8 feet high, except where it has been lately burnt for then one sees only wide stretches of charred earth, fissured into a million fragments, like a gigantic ill-fitting jigsaw puzzle, and strewn with burnt stalks of grass and with

* Jackson, *op. cit.*

† Hunter and Phillips, *op. cit.*

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ashes. Where the grasses have been burnt some time ago green shoots have sprung up around the charred stems. Here and there stand isolated, thorny, shadeless trees, stunted by fire and spreading out their black tortured branches. Often no tree is visible in any direction and a desolate waste stretches everywhere to the horizon. The burning of the tall grasses has revealed low termite mounds, blackened by fire like the ground from which they rise. There is smoke and flame where parts of the country are still on fire. This country is uninhabited in the rains, being under water, but in February one sees occasional cattle camps around the deeper pools.

In Western Nuerland conditions are in the main similar though there are certain differences. Western Nuerland lies between the Bahr el Jebel and the Bahr el Ghazal and extends to the north of the Bahr el Ghazal as far as the southern boundary of Kordofan Province. It consists for the most part of 'cotton soil' and like Eastern Nuerland is so dead flat that if one mounts a small termite mound one can see in all directions as far as the eye can reach. Here and there are ridges of higher ground. These village sites are always inland because, whereas the higher banks of the Sobat and Pibor allow occupation here and there, the Bahr el Jebel and the Bahr el Ghazal have no banks in their flood seasons and their beds are bordered by wide marshes. These marshes often run for several miles inland and there are very few spots on the Bahr el Jebel where it is possible to land and penetrate into the interior of the country, even in the dry season.

I have already expressed an opinion that the area covered by swamp vegetation has been exaggerated. That is an empirical judgment. The marsh vegetation, generally referred to as *sudd* in the Sudan, is a solid mass of water plants, the principal among them being papyrus (*Cyperus Papyrus*), '*Um sif*' (*Panicum pyramidale*) and the common reed (*Phragmites Communis*), to which cling a number of swimming plants (*Utricularia, Vallisneria, Azolla, Pistia, Aldrovandia*, etc.). Creepers especially *Vigna Nilotica* and *Ipomaea*, bind the marsh plants together into a tangled mass. Here and there grow patches of ambatch trees.* Lagoons run out of the

* Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, pp. 302-3.

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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tap. A big open river is generally called *bir e.g.* the Bahr el Jebel and the Sobat but a river may have its proper name, *e.g.* the Bahr el Ghazal is called Naam. Smaller rivers or streams are denoted by the word *yir*. A marshy depression inland is called *wang* and a big lagoon running out of one of one of the main rivers is called *bar*. A marshy depression running parallel to a river bank is called *lor*. *Tor* are extensive swamps which form the flood plains of rivers.

VIII

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From my description of their country it will be seen that the Nuer are faced with problems which daunt men better equipped than them. For they are so poor that they have little but their courage and their knowledge to master a harsh environment. Nuer have to consider how to protect and pasture their cattle and also how to grow maize and millet, for they practise both cattle husbandry and hoe-culture and have to take the requirements of both into account. As gardeners their difficulties only arise in the rains for in the dry season nothing will grow in the waterless wastes. As herdsmen there are problems to be solved at all seasons. Gardening will be described later. Here we may consider how Nuer ensure the welfare of their herds by adapting their life to the seasons.

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Excess or insufficiency of water is their first problem. It is essential that men and cattle should be protected from the water which covers most of the country in the rains. Cattle get diseases of the hooves and die if they have to stand in water. Protection is given to man and beast by building huts and byres on higher ground. In selecting a village site two considerations must be borne in mind. Firstly there must be a sloping ridge off which rain-water can run to the plain below and this ridge must be broad enough to allow huts and byres to be built and for the cattle to be tethered in the kraals outside the byres. Preferably it should also be broad and long enough to allow the flocks and herds to pasture without having to descend into the inundated plains to graze among the tall rank grasses. Secondly there must be land on one side of the ridge suitable for cultivation, *i.e.*, land which will retain sufficient water for the millet to grow

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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whereas in a similar year Eastern Gaajok country is under water and cattle have to be sent into Lou country while the men fish from trees. Lou are very scornful of Eastern Jikany village sites. I once asked Wichhiel, who now lives at Maccom in Jikany country, whether he could call his present home a *gwaadh wec* (village site) and he replied "Well, it is what the Jikany call a *gwaagh wec*, but it is not what we consider a *gwaadh wec* in our own country (Lou). They just build their villages in the forest anyhow." Huts built on piles, such as one sees in parts of Dinkaland, are unknown in Nuerland.

Water is as scarce in the dry season as it is excessive in the wet season. About the beginning of December, therefore, the young men and some of the girls take most of the cattle to camps some miles from the villages and leave the rest of the women and the married men to harvest the second millet crop and repair huts and byres. A few lactating cows are left in the village to provide milk for the small children. The cattle are taken to camps partly to give them clean water and partly to pasture them. The grasses are burnt and some species spring up again a few days after they are fired. This is a good time for the cattle because they can move freely, the tall grasses which impeded them in the rains having been burnt, and because they can graze to their hearts' content on the tender young shoots.

Local conditions determine the time of leaving the village. In 1936 the first youths to take their cattle into camp from the village of Nyueny moved on November 13th, at the beginning of the *Nuer* month of *Kur*. This is much earlier than is usual for most villages and was due to lack of clean water at Nyueny and over-grazing of the pastures in the vicinity. The country around the village was all under water in the middle of October but was parched a month later. Most people do not move till the end of the month of *Kur* or the beginning of the month of *Tiop tedit* (about the middle of December).

In Lou country the first camps are often made in thorn-wood forests near deep pools, but in parts of Nuerland, especially in the

S:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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history to a nuclear clan have acquired so much associated tradition that the attachment is confirmed.

Land tenure here means the holding of, and rights to, the high ridges and sandy outcrops which the Nuer occupy during the wet season, where they build their permanent villages and cattle-byres and clear their cultivations, and the various forms of land used for pasture and fishing in the dry season. That certain communities, consisting of the *diel* and later accretions by association, have a definite right to distinct areas is clearly recognized by all Nuer. The sanction for possession in the past was, however, physical force and power to resist the encroachment of others, while nowadays the *status quo* is maintained by the Government.[1]

Occupation of the land and prescriptive rights to a certain territory are often expressed in mythological terms linked to the history of the nuclear lineage. The original ancestor is said to have divided land among his sons, themselves ancestors of particular collateral lineages, in the same way as he divided his cattle and sometimes his ritual functions among them. But this is merely an idiom which gives emotional emphasis to ownership of land vested in that nuclear lineage, for land, either arable or pasture, is not a form of property which is normally controlled by the laws of inheritance. A man's eldest son will inherit his huts and cattle-byre, while the other sons continue to occupy them so long as they wish to do so, particularly if they are not married; but, as younger sons, they have no specified portions of their father's land, and there is consequently no individual inheritance of land. When they wish to do so, they will build their houses and set up their homes in some area which is unoccupied, for there is usually no shortage.

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As I have explained in the introduction, three types of land are utilized by the Nuer, and each is of definite value at certain times of the year. The 'high land', ridges of higher, better-drained ground, provides for the permanent settlements mainly occupied during the rains from approximately May until November, though the period varies according to latitude and local climatic conditions. This area is largely used for the cultivation of millet (their staple crop), of maize and tobacco and the few vegetables which some Nuer grow. Beyond, and usually surrounding the higher ridges, are the 'intermediate' grass plains which are subject to variable flooding from accumulated rainfall which only drains away with difficulty, especially if the ground is already sat[illegible]. These 'intermediate' areas are utilized at the end of the rains for pasture so long as sufficient moisture remains in the soil to allow a green regrowth from the perennial grasses after they

[1] Nuer did not confine their aggressive movements to the Dinka. Other Nuer tribes were often attacked and their territory occupied. For example, the Lou Nuer originally occupied the Zeraf Island, but a military alliance between Thiang and Leik drove them out.

8;Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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have been burnt or close cropped. Later they dry out and become unpalatable, and by this time the inland pools are also dry, so that the people must move their herds to the *toic*. The word *toic* in some contexts merely means 'summer grazing', in others more specifically the marshes bordering the main channels of the rivers, their smaller tributaries, and the network of minor drainage channels found everywhere in Nuerland. Here a combination of soil, depth and period of immersion from river-spill and other factors produces grasses which, to a greater or lesser degree, are valuable as pasture throughout the dry months of the year. Beyond/this are the permanent papyrus swamps (*mafi*), which scarcely dry out at all and are useless for grazing and (at present) are not used for crop production.

This classification is necessarily arbitrary and relative, for the difference of level is rarely more than a few feet, and there is no clear-cut boundary between the different types of land.[1] Moreover, though 'high land' is nearly always limited,[2] 'intermediate' land may extend no more than a few hundred yards before *toic* is found in the flood-plain of neighbouring watercourses, or it may continue for more than fifty miles. Such varying distances have their effect on the seasonal movements of the people, but—again as a broad generalization—the main feature, the balanced utilization of all three types of land according to the season, is common to all Nuer.

For these reasons ownership of the land necessarily includes all three, and when a Nuer speaks of his *rol*, his country, or sometimes his *dhor*, he envisages a territory which includes 'high land' for cultivation and permanent settlements, 'intermediate' land for pasture in the early months of the dry season, *toic* for summer grazing and fishing. *Rol* Gaawar is a complete territory in this respect; within it each primary segment has its own complete area, *rol* Radh and *rol* Bor, and within these the secondary segments, *rol* (*piny*) Kerbil, *rol* (*piny*) Pur and so on.[3] Thus territory and rights in land follow the segmentary system, but this does not mean that an individual or even a small group of people will necessarily confine their movements to the territory of the segment to which by tradition and practice they should belong. Living in one permanent settlement during the rains, they may well choose to herd their cattle in the dry season pastures of a different segment of the tribe, or in some cases to cross the boundaries of another tribe. They will do so, however, only by agreement with the 'owners' of that territory, though such agreements are often implicit rather than defined. It is clearly recognized that ownership of the land lies with the segment of the tribe from which the name of the area derives, in other words, from the dominant lineage. *Rol* (*piny*) Kerbil is theoretically the exclusive property of all descendants of

[1] See Jonglei Investigation Team, *Progress Report*, 1946-9.
[2] See map on p. 13. [3] See p. 10.